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BAPTISTS



ASSOCIATION OFFICERS — Newly-elected officers of the Mississippi Baptist Ministry Assistants Association include (front row, from left) Linda Coleman, first vice-president; Sharon Brewer, president; (back row, from left) Scheryl Ng, area five representative; Kay McDonnell, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB); Betty Anne Bailey, chaplain; Robbie Linley, chaplain; Julie Field, area two representative; Lisa Thornton, second vice-president; Sandi Komurke, area five representative; Dimmie Cunningham, area nine representative. (BR photo by Tony Martin)

Association (MBMAA) heard reports, adopted a budget, established a scholarship fund, and elected new officers.

Other activities included a silent auction to raise funds for the MBMAA organization, the awarding of door prizes, and a grand prize.

The Mississippi Baptist Ministry Assistants Conference is sponsored by the Pastor/Leadership Development Department of Mississippi Baptist

Convention Board, and funded by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program. For more information, contact MBMAA President Sharon Brewer at Rankin Baptist Association, P.O. Box 1257, Brandon, MS 39043. Telephone: (601) 939-2182. E-mail: sbrewer@rankinbaptists.org.

Jenkins is a retired former church /pastor's secretary and ministry assistant at First Church, Yazoo City.

Min. assistants fellowship at Garaywa

By Linda Jenkins
Correspondent

Participants in the 2005 Mississippi Baptist Ministry Assistants Conference from churches, associations, colleges, agencies, the Baptist Building, and other work places across the state experienced "a blast from the past" this spring at Camp Garaywa in Clinton, where they gathered for two days of learning, information, inspiration, fun, and fellowship with a 1950s theme.

This year's conference was planned and coordinated by Robbie Linley, ministry assistant at Winston Association in Louisville. She chose "Devoted To You" as the conference theme, based on Psalm 86:2 (NLT): "Protect me, for I am devoted to you. Save me for I serve you. You are my God."

Jay Scribner, long-time pastor of First Church, Branson, Missouri, was the featured speaker for the general sessions. Music and praise time was directed by Steve and Becky Carver of One Way Ministries in Mathiston.

The ministry assistants had a choice of seven break-out sessions which were directed by trained conference leaders from across the state.

The evening banquet continued the conference theme of the 1950s. Poodle skirts, bobby socks, saddle oxfords, sneakers, and rolled-up jeans were the outfits of choice. Prizes were awarded for costume originality in a number of categories. Entertainment was provided by the Brick Street Quartet from Clinton, with a surprise visit by "Elvis" Scribner.

An on-site LifeWay Christian Store gave opportunities for shopping. Representatives of GuideStone (formerly the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention) worked with the ministry assistants in planning for their future and retirement.

At their business meeting, members of Mississippi Baptist Ministry Assistants

falling water to be extremely calming and attracting," Ross McGary, a spokesman for Stone Soup, told Baptist Press.

Don Winget, chairman of the department of astronomy at the University of Texas-Austin, will share science-based experiences for all ages, and the works of renowned artist M.C. Escher will be on display throughout the festival.

The name Stone Soup is derived from an old French children's tale about a village that comes together for a common cause.

The Stone Soup Festival will be the first such project for the organizers of a ministry with the same name that provides a respite for parents

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—The Stone Soup Festival preceding the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting promises to reach out to the community in a unique way by ministering to families of children with special needs.

The festival coincides with the Crossover Nashville evangelistic event involving about 12,000 registered volunteers June 18 prior to this year's Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting.

About 150 families have signed up to accompany their children with special needs during the Stone Soup Festival's interactive hands-on learning activities designed to interest children and adults of all ages and abilities.

The festival will be in the Nashville Convention Center's Grand Ballroom June 18 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Parents may select a start time for the two-hour tour between those hours, with registration at www.stonesoupnews.com.

Creation is the theme for the festival, and families will walk through representations of the first seven days of the earth's beginning. Main attractions include a "Rainbow of Colors" light show, a waterfall, science-based experiments, music, animation, take-home projects and sculpting.

"The waterfall is important as most children with special needs, especially those with autism, find the sound and motion of

of children with special needs one Friday night a month and ministers to families each Sunday at Redeemer Fellowship, a partnership with Judson Church in Nashville.

Stone Soup's mission is to provide a way for families with children who have disabilities to fully participate in and contribute to the Christian community and to encourage families that have added stress because their children require more attention than most.

So far, about 300 volunteers have signed up to help with the Stone Soup Festival, but organizers set a goal of 1,000 helpers. For more information about Crossover Nashville, go to www.everyonecan.net.



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Remember church; see you in Nashville

Whew! Summer is here, another school year is behind us, and we're all ready to play (and not just the kids, either). We have a lot of living to pack in to the few short weeks before school starts again. There's the big vacation to Florida, the tee times at the country club, the softball season leading to championship playoffs, the yard-of-the-month work, and, lest we forget, the simple joy of relaxation from a strict schedule for a few weeks as the approaching heat wave slows down everyone and everything.

One of those things that invariably slows down during Mississippi summers is church participation, at least where Mississippi Baptists are concerned. Statistics bear out that we tend to get a little slack in our church attendance and financial support during the summer months as we put away our regular routine, kick back, and become somewhat self-absorbed. Regrettably, we tend to develop a temporary tolerance for warm weather activities that would take us away from church.

It's an easy habit to develop, given that most churches also give their program workers a much-deserved break during the summer. Royal Ambassadors, Girls in Action, Acteens, the sanctuary choir, Bible studies, and many other programmed activities of the church go on summer hiatus.

That doesn't mean church shuts down, however, or that church expenses take a summer vacation. Salaries still have to be paid. Utility bills still show up in the mail-

box on a regular schedule, even if we're not showing up at church on a regular schedule. Pipes still leak, light bulbs still burn out, and the office supply closet still has to be stocked with pencils and paper clips.

As we plunge into another delightful Mississippi summer, let us not fail to include worship in our plans. We owe it to the Creator of summer and summer fun. Our Lord yearns to be included in every aspect of our lives, so let's not put Him on the shelf for the summer. Let's remember to honor our financial commitments to our churches this summer, too.

• • • •

Attending the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was once a much-anticipated rite of summer. Attendance has fallen off in recent years but then and now, the days and nights of preaching, worship, and praise are virtually unparalleled in the Protestant world. Sure, there are and have been fights and disagreements over the years (we are Baptists, after all), but it's difficult to go away from an annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention without a sense of the passion and purpose we have as a united people dedicated to the idea that we can win the world to Jesus. The same is true of the annual meetings of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

The SBC annual meeting will be held this year on June 21-22 in Nashville — barely more than a tank of gas and day's drive one-way for most Mississippi Baptists. As the annual meeting is intentionally spread around the country to include all Southern Baptists, many Mississippi Baptists often can't attend the more far-flung meetings. Not so with

"YOU KNOW, HON — EVERY CHRISTIAN OUGHT TO TAKE SOME TIME OFF OCCASIONALLY, TO RELAX AND READ A BOOK, GET SOME SUN! IT'S NOT WRONG — JUST SO LONG AS THE PASTOR IS ALWAYS ON DUTY BACK AT THE CHURCH!"



Nashville, however, so make plans to attend and represent your church as a voting messenger.

If you would like more information on being a messenger from your church, talk with your pastor. For more information on the annual meeting, including speakers and schedules, visit www.sbc.net.

Whether it's the SBC annual meeting or the annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, don't pass up an opportunity to see the mighty work God is accomplishing through His people called Baptists. Just be careful — you may want to get involved for more than one short meeting.

GUEST OPINION: *A man who made a difference*

By Ronald Meeks
Blue Mountain College

Mississippi Baptists have been blessed throughout the years to have outstanding educators teaching in its Baptist-affiliated schools. A few months ago we said goodbye to one of our most influential educators when James L. Travis died.

Travis was professor emeritus of Blue Mountain College (BMC). He came to BMC as head of the Bible Department in the summer of 1960, shortly after graduating from New Orleans Seminary. In retrospect, his arrival seems providential as BMC had only recently opened its doors to men who were preparing for the ministry.

Travis had a brilliant mind, a caring heart, and a burning desire to teach young men who had been called into the Gospel ministry. With tireless energy and undaunted enthusiasm, he labored to build the ministerial program at BMC until 1996, when he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage which left him unable to meet the heavy demands of teaching.

During his thirty-six years at Blue Mountain College he made a difference for the kingdom of God and for Mississippi Baptists.

Travis or "Doc," as his students called him, was blessed with many gifts and sought to use all them to make a difference in the world. He was an effective preacher and became known widely for his work as an interim pastor, revival

preacher, and Bible teacher. During his ministry he gave direction to scores of churches through his work as an interim pastor. He preached revivals and conducted Winter Bible Studies in hundreds of churches across Mississippi. His love for Christ and desire to build the church led him to invest countless hours in working with local churches to heal their hurts and deal with their conflicts.

He also made a difference as an innovative leader. Early on in his ministry, Travis, along with the Bible teachers from the other Baptist-affiliated colleges in Mississippi, saw a need for young ministers to understand what it meant to be a Baptist. They felt that the young men who were preparing for ministry in Baptist churches needed to understand Baptist history, polity, and doctrine. They developed a course, Introduction to Baptist Life, which was taught in all the Baptist colleges and

designed to help these future church leaders to have a theological and practical introduction to their work. As I look at the cooperation of Mississippi Baptists today, especially as compared with other state conventions, I cannot help but believe that it is due, in part, to the vision Travis and these other Baptist leaders had over 40 years ago.

Perhaps his greatest contribution to the kingdom and to Mississippi Baptists was through his teaching at BMC. We hear much discussion today about teaching and living with passion, but Travis taught and lived with passion long before it was in vogue long before it was a recommended element of pedagogy. His students who were in his New Testament classes can remember how as he talked about Jesus his eyes would well up with tears and his voice would break. One sensed that this man was filled with gratitude for what Jesus had done for him.

At the heart of his teaching ministry was his desire to help the students entrusted to him to be effective servants for Christ. Perhaps no verse better characterizes his life than 2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things that thou has heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." He wanted to pass along the truths of the Bible so that his students would pass it along to others.

Today his students are serving all over the world. Some serve in key places of leadership where they are widely recognized and some serve in small quiet pastorate where no one but their members know who they are but they serve. They too make a difference for the kingdom.

Travis proved that one does not have to be tall in stature to be a big man or leave large and clear footprints. He showed that one does not have to be in a large place to make an enormous impact for the kingdom of God. His life teaches us all that one can make a difference if he or she has a mind that seeks the truth, a heart that loves the people, hands that go to work, and feet that move swiftly to do good.

"Doc" made a difference in this world because he was the right man in the right place at the right time, doing the right thing.

Meeks serves as associate professor of biblical studies at BMC.

Big group headed to world's mission fields

MIDLAND, Texas (BP) — The second-largest group of new missionaries in the history of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board (IMB) was appointed May 20 during a commissioning service at Midland College in Midland, Texas.

All 116 of the new missionaries share one thing in common — a clear call from God to go to the nations with the Gospel. Some heard His call as children. Others heard Him through the voices and prayers of their own children. Many heard while serving overseas as volunteers or short-term missions workers.

They'll join more than 5,200 others already working around the world.

Many of the new workers didn't tell the crowd their full names or where they're going because of the difficult, potentially dangerous areas where they will serve.

"They are going to places where a few years ago we would never have imagined sending missionaries," said IMB President Jerry Rankin, a native Mississippian and graduate of Baptist-affiliated Mississippi College in Clinton. "They have found channels of creative access to share the Gospel in restricted countries and among unreached people groups."

Yet no matter how well they have prepared themselves for the mission task, he added, only God can accomplish it through them as they serve Him.

"God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called," Rankin told the new missionaries. "Your call wasn't to be a missionary. It was to the Lordship of Jesus."



MISSION BOUND—New missionary Karen Lee (left) of Camarillo, Calif., receives her certificate of appointment from International Mission Board (IMB) President Jerry Rankin during the May 20 commissioning service at Midland (Texas) College. She will serve in Africa with her husband Richard. (IMB photo by Bill Bangham)

That's something this new band of servants also shares with the largest-ever group of new Southern Baptist missionaries — the 124 people who were appointed in 2001, only two months after 9/11.

God's voice

- How did God speak to one couple going to Africa? For him, the voice came through an atheist college student — and an

orphan on the streets of Calcutta. For her, it came through a burn victim in Bangalore, India, and a six-month-old baby with AIDS in Zimbabwe.

"God's call, which has burned in both of our hearts since junior high, is now leading us to the ends of the earth," he said.

- For Jonathan C., who is on the way to Asia, the decisive moment came as he told Bible stories in a West African village. "Four men were invited; 22 came," he recounted. "God said, 'This is what I want you to do.'"

- "After being a police officer for nine years, God told me to no longer put people in jail, but to set them free with the Gospel," another appointee said.

- "A missionary came to speak at our church last summer, and God spoke six words that freaked me out: 'You need to walk this road,'" recounted Roger L., also going to Asia. "I said, 'God, you've got the wrong man.' He said, 'No, I don't.' So I said, 'Here I am. Send me.'"

- "In 1975 we began praying for Russian believers imprisoned for sharing the Gospel, never imagining that God would call us to share the Gospel and plant churches in Moscow alongside those heroes of faith," Charles Moeller said, his voice filled with awe.

- "Thirty years ago I came to America with the hope for a better life," said one of the 18 ethnic Asians appointed. "I got much more than that. Now I'm going back [to Asia] to share the blessings."

- "Showing my toddler photos of children of south Asia, I told her, 'These children don't know Jesus,'" another new missionary related. "She said, 'Mommy, you've got to tell 'em.'"

- "We were seeking the American dream," said Angie W., also going to south Asia with her husband. "Little did we know that God had a greater plan. As we looked for a reason, a purpose for living, God told us to first seek Him."

Church sign removed

FOREST CITY, N.C. (BP) — After receiving volumes of negative feedback over a sign carrying a disrespectful message about the Koran, the Muslim holy book, outside the church where he is pastor, Creighton Lovelace has apologized for his actions and says he will remove the sign. In a statement released May 25, Lovelace said he "did not realize how people of the Muslim faith view the Koran — that devoted Muslims view it more highly than many in the U.S. view the Bible. Now I realize how offensive this is to them, and after praying about it, I have chosen to remove the sign," he said. "I apologize for posting that message and deeply regret that it has offended so many in the Muslim community." Creighton is pastor of Danieltown Church in Rutherford County, N.C., which is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The portable display in front of the church read, "The Koran needs to be flushed." The sign was an apparent reference to a Newsweek article, since retracted, that alleged that U.S. interrogators at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, had placed copies of Islam's holy book in washrooms and had flushed one down the toilet to get inmates to talk. The article incited deadly riots in Afghanistan and caused large protests in Muslim countries around the world. In his apology, Creighton said his intentions were only to remind people of the importance of the Bible, not to disrespect another religion's holy book. "I firmly believe that the Bible is God's Word — that it is indeed the only divine written revelation from God," he said. "I also firmly believe that Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation available to mankind. Today, I believe these truths more than ever before. When I posted the sign in front of the church, it was my intent only to affirm and exalt the Bible and its teachings," he added. "It was certainly not my intent to insult any people of faith, but instead to remind the people in this community of the preeminence of God's Word." Morris H. Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, expressed disapproval of the sign May 24, noting that Southern Baptists seek to relate to Muslims in a respectful manner conducive to the mutual sharing of beliefs.

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THE
SECOND
FRONT PAGE

THE BAPTIST
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Looking back

10 years ago

Floyd Higginbotham, pastor of Pleasant Hill Church, Lincoln County, begins a ministry of providing free air transportation to people who need organ transplants.

20 years ago

Sensing an opportunity to fight crime and Satan at the same time by getting to know local residents, members of Forrest Avenue Church, Biloxi, organize the first church-sponsored Neighborhood Watch program in the state of Mississippi.

50 years ago

At least 62 members of the churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention are planning to attend the Ninth Congress of the Baptist World Alliance to be held in Royal Albert Hall, London.

CHECK OUT THE
BACKGROUND CHECKS



YOU CAN RESPOND
RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer
with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you.
(I have sinned.)

2. I want forgiveness for my
sins and freedom from eternal
death. (I repent.)

3. I believe Jesus died and
rose from the grave to forgive
my sins and to restore my
relationship with you.
(I believe in Jesus.)

4. By faith, I invite Jesus
Christ into my life. From this
time on, I want to live in a
loving relationship with Him.
(I receive Christ as my Savior
and Lord.)

"But as many as received him,
to them he gave the right to
become children of God, even to
those who believe in his name."
(John 1:12)

If you make a decision for
Jesus Christ today, contact a
local Baptist church for spiritual
guidance.

When a church is filling a position of service, whether it is for the pastor or another staff position, it is an important time of decision and an opportunity to serve the Lord and His people. In the process that takes place in filling a position one of the most critical aspects of that endeavor is to check out the background checks. Regardless of the position, whether it is for pastor, youth, music, childcare, secretarial, or administrative position, **check out the background checks.**

It is amazing how many times that no check is ever made from the reference list. They just ignore checking anything out. Later, problems arise and often the problems could have been seen before the person was ever hired. It is a fact that it is a whole lot easier not to call someone than it is to call them and then try to figure out how you will let them go. So let me encourage you to **check out the background checks.**

There are a number of problems related to doing or not doing background checks. The first that I hear the most about is that whether it is the personnel committee, search committee, or the pastor it is often assumed that the people on the reference list will give a good reference. They think that the person would not have put them on the form if they were not going to give them a good reference. WRONG! Sometimes people list names without asking permission, and there are times when they even put down names of people they do not even know.



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

You may think that sounds incredible and it is, but this has happened to me a number of times. I have received a call from someone wanting to check a reference because my name was listed. I did not know, had never met, and had never even heard of the person who put my name on the list. Honestly, when this happens I begin to think, "I must be in the early stage or some stage of Alzheimer's disease." Then sure enough I discover that I have never laid eyes on these folks. Sometimes people assume that neither the committee nor anyone else is going to check these references. It might look good to have the name of the executive director of the Convention on my reference list. I certainly do not mind my name being listed, but I would prefer that they ask me or at least that I know the person requesting a referral.

The other issue that folks do not consider is that sometimes in the reference process the person being considered might not fit the position being offered. The persons listed as references can help a committee or a designated person clarify if they think it would be a good connection. Personally, I genuinely want to serve the Lord, but if I was being considered for the position of minister of music, I am confident

that all of the references given to a committee would advise you to run. So **check out the background checks** in order to get a sense of the person's potential for a position.

Another significant issue related to background checks is to listen to what the person is saying. You must be thoughtful, you need to be cautious, and you certainly need to be discriminating to understand what is being said. In the legal arena it is called "due diligence." Get all of the information you can, understand it as best you can from your sources, and relate it to the situation and circumstances. You are not just looking for dirt, but you are looking for God's continuing affirmation in the search. Similarly, if someone has reason to raise a red flag, do not ignore it.

Some years ago I received a call related to a person about a staff position and after they had gone through their questionnaire they had one final question to ask me. "If you had opportunity to have this individual on your staff, would you hire this person?" After a brief pause I said, "No." Then the person asked, "What did you say?" I said, "Absolutely not!" Now I had tried to be careful and yet very forthright in my answers, but the questioner had

paid little or no attention to what I had said. Basically, they had met with this person, decided they wanted to call the person, and were ignoring everything they were being told. When asked the question, I knew that I would not hire this person and so I said, "No." The committee went straight ahead, called, and moved the person on the church field and within six months had to dismiss this person from their ministry staff.

When you call people for a background check, don't always take everything at face value. Allow some room for misinterpretation, misunderstanding, or even misguided thinking, but if you continue to receive the same red flags, don't drive off a cliff.

So let me sum up by saying, "**Check out the background checks.**" Then do the following things before, during, and after you call the person.

1. **Pray** — Seek and never stop seeking God's guidance.

2. **Process** — Step by step, open door after open door, and keep moving forward as long as God is giving you affirmation.

3. **Proceed** to the celebration of God bringing a new servant into the vineyard where you live.

You will be thankful a thousand times that you did the background checks and if you do not do the background checks, you will regret it ten thousand times. Just remember as you go through the process of looking for a new pastor or other staff member, **check out the background checks.**

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Crews retires from SBC's Golden Gate Seminary

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP) — The life and presidency of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary's William "Bill" O. Crews was celebrated April 12 at a retirement dinner attended by trustees, faculty, staff and friends.

Crews served as president from 1986-2003. During that time, more than 2,500 seminary graduates served as Christian leaders or missionaries in 30 countries around the world.

"The word 'leadership' defines Bill Crews," current seminary president Jeff Iorg said, adding that Crews has been a mentor and friend to him for many years.

Iorg told those in attendance Crews deserves the accolades he has received. He said Crews comforted him when he was seriously ill and "helped me learn the things that were happening in the Southern Baptist Convention." Iorg told Crews, "You have been a constant source of confidence and stability during the transition to a new administration."

"Thank you for a remarkable legacy," faculty spokesman John Shouse told Crews, adding that one of Crews' greatest contributions was in creating a close connection between the seminary and the churches it serves.

Crews said he was "grateful" for the 18 years he served at Golden Gate Seminary.

"I am also grateful for those, who from 1859 to the present, have made the

seminary dream come true," he said, referencing the seminary's 19th-century roots. The seminary officially opened a century later, in 1959. "We're stewards of their dream of shaping effective leaders for the churches of tomorrow."

Several hundred friends and colleagues attended the dinner and heard praises from representatives of the faculty, students, the Southern Baptist Convention, and Marin County community.

Crews became the sixth president of the Golden Gate Seminary in December 1986, transitioning to the role of chancellor in 2003. He replaced Frank Pollard, who resigned to accept the call to pastor First Church, Jackson, for a second time.

Crews came to the seminary from Riverside, Calif., where he served as pastor of Magnolia Avenue Church for eight years. Previously he served as a pastor at churches in Washington, Oregon, and

Texas. He also served on the staff of the Northwest Baptist Convention.

He served on the seminary board of trustees from 1982-86. He has also served as president of the Northwest Baptist Convention and the California Southern Baptist Convention. His local community activities include the boards of the Marin County Chamber of Commerce, the North Bay Council, and Marin General Hospital.

Crews holds a bachelor of arts degree from Hardin-Simmons University and a bachelor of divinity degree from Southwestern Seminary.

He earned his doctor of ministry degree from Golden Gate Seminary in December 2000. He was awarded two honorary degrees in 1987: the doctor of humanities degree from Hardin-Simmons University in Texas and the doctor of divinity degree from California Baptist University.

During his tenure as Golden Gate president, the seminary established new campuses in Phoenix, Ariz., (1995) and Denver, Colo. (1996).

The seminary also achieved accreditation approval to offer full masters degrees at all five of the seminary's campuses.

Golden Gate Seminary is a Cooperative Program ministry of the Southern Baptist Convention, and operates five campuses in Northern California, Southern California, the Pacific Northwest, Arizona, and Colorado.



Crews

Blackaby looks back on Experiencing God



SWEET MUSIC — In addition to the four to five hours Henry Blackaby spends each day in Bible study and prayer, he enjoys playing the piano at his Atlanta home. (BP photo by Kent Harville)

ATLANTA (BP) — Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God, has a simple but challenging message: Find out where God is at work and join Him there.

Fifteen years after its release, the workbook by Henry Blackaby and Claude King continues to change lives. Published by LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, it has sold more than four million copies and has been licensed in 62 languages, from Chinese and Mongolian to Hebrew and Arabic.

A Canadian, Blackaby was pastor at Faith Church in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, for 12 years and then served as director of missions in Vancouver for two years before moving to the United States to become director of prayer and spiritual awakening at the North American Mission Board (NAMB). He later served as special assistant to the presidents of NAMB, the International Mission Board, and LifeWay. Since his retirement, he has devoted his time to Blackaby Ministries International, based in suburban Atlanta.

"Experiencing God is my life's message," Blackaby said. "It's how I had always understood and walked with God. This is how I pastored and led God's people."

The message of Experiencing God is built upon what Blackaby calls the "Seven Realities":

- God is always at work around you.
- God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.

• God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.

• God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes and His ways.

• God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.

• You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.

• You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work through you.

King, who at that time was an editor at LifeWay, constructed the workbook and authored its learning activities, based on Blackaby's conference presentations. King is currently an editor in chief in the leadership and adult publishing area.

"Experiencing God set a new model for workbooks," King said. "We videotaped Henry as he spoke to groups at Glorieta, then transcribed the tapes and compiled it all as a first-person narrative and added the learning activities."

King said Experiencing God was different from what Southern Baptists were accustomed to studying. It was not a program, but an experience. "As people began responding to the message in the workbook, we saw lives changed," he said.

Blackaby's life has changed considerably since the workbook's release. "One of the best parts is now, everywhere we go, Marilynn [his wife] and I hear the most wonderful stories from

people," he said. "We hear how their lives have been changed."

Blackaby gets more than 2,000 invitations a year to speak and lead conferences around the world based on the Experiencing God message. Accepting all those is humanly impossible, so how does he choose?

"I have to make certain I have a discerning spirit," he said. "The size or location of an event is not important. I look and determine if God is already at work. And I won't do an event if I feel like I have been invited just because my presence will draw a crowd."

Experiencing God has proved to be an important LifeWay resource for reaching into other cultures.

"Experiencing God is one of those resources that has translated well to the needs of our overseas churches," said Luis Lopez of LifeWay's international department. "It's been on the market for 15 years and people have become very familiar with it.

"In South Africa, for example, we have done weekend studies similar to the Experiencing God weekends that we do here, and churches have had tremendous results from those," Lopez said.

Through a partnership with LifeWay Brazil, more than 80,000 copies of Experiencing God in Portuguese have been sold. "In Latin American churches, discipleship is a major concern and Experiencing God has been a wonderful blessing," Lopez said. "The seven realities speak cross-culturally."

In addition to Spanish and French, the 62 languages into which Experiencing God has been translated include Burmese, Thai, Maasai, Turkish, Greek, Kurdish and Polish.

In January LifeWay released A 40-Day Experience: Reality, 7 Truths from Experiencing God, by Henry and Richard Blackaby. It uses the popular 40-day format to capture the impact of an Experiencing God weekend overview. The workbook, leader kit and DVD draw from The 7 Realities of Experiencing God Video Series and the Experiencing God Day by Day Devotional.

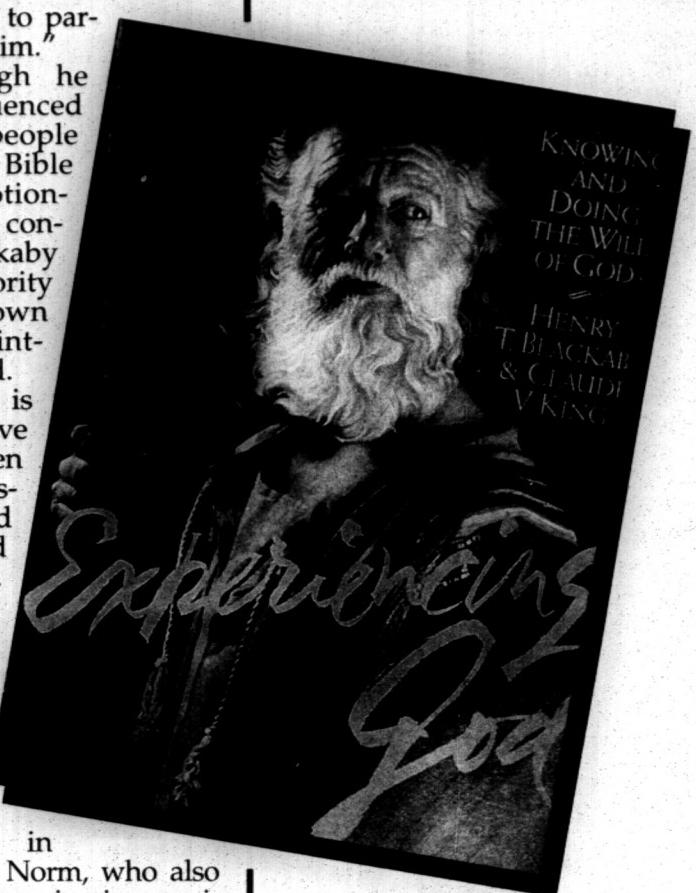
Experiencing God also is available as an online study at LifeWay.com, joining two Beth Moore studies: Believing God, and Living Beyond Yourself.

Sal Sberna, pastor of Metropolitan Church in Houston, hosts the online study. "I've led several groups through this study and each time that I have, I've discovered some significant and fresh insights, not only into who God is, but what that means in my own personal life," Sberna said. "I have found from my own personal experience that the more intimately that I know God and His ways, the more significant I feel in my everyday

life being able to participate with Him."

Even though he has influenced countless people through his Bible studies, devotionals, books and conferences, Blackaby makes it a priority to keep his own daily appointment with God.

Blackaby is proud that all five of his children and their spouses are involved in ministry and missions. Richard is president of the Canadian Seminary in Cochrane, Alberta; Mel is pastor of Bow Valley Church in Cochrane; and Norm, who also lives in Cochrane, is vice president of Blackaby Ministries International. Tom is pastor of North Sea Church in Stavanger, Norway, and Carrie is a career missionary with the International Mission Board in Germany.



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STAFF CHANGES



Eaves & wife Anna

Mt. Gilead, Meridian, called **Gilbert Eaves** as pastor April 10. Shown are Gilbert and his wife, Anna.

K e i t h Sanders was called as pastor of First Church, Kellar, Tex., where he has served as associate pastor for the previous two years.

Sanders is the former pastor of French Camp Church, French Camp, and is the son of Wayne Sanders of Noxapater.

Rocky Creek, Lucedale, recently called **Michael D. Morgan** as minister of students. Morgan served as minister of students at First Church, Enterprise, Ala.



First Church, Greenwood, has called **Barry Bouchillon** as minister of music/education. He and his wife Nancy come from First Church, Eupora.

J ohnny Sykes, Brookhaven, has gone to the Tri-County Association of Arkansas as Associational Missions Director. Sykes comes from Longview Church, Pontotoc.



Sykes

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JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. Baptized in a Pond, Eagle Ridge Community Church, Raymond



2. Nicaragua Mission Trip, Carterville Church, Petal



1. **Eagle Ridge Community Church, Raymond**, held Baptized in a Pond May 15 at Canaan Plantation, baptizing seven. Shown is Bryan Presson, pastor, with Walker Wilson.

2. Leland Hogan, pastor of **Carterville Church, Petal**, led a team of 47 doctors, dentists, nurses, ministers and lay people on a week-long mission trip to Nicaragua. The team operated out of several small school buildings in the village of San Jose de Gracias, meeting the physical and spiritual needs of the Nicaraguan nationals.

3. **Williamsville Church, Kosciusko**, recently held their annual RA and GA recognition. Shown are the participants.

4. The Fran Buckley Women on Mission group of **First Church, McComb**, recently met for Bible study and remember the birth of WMU in May, 1888. Shown are the participants.

5. A group of 17 senior adults from **First Church, McLaurin**, recently traveled to Mobile, Ala., to tour Bellingrath Gardens. Shown are the participants. Also, a group of WMU ladies and

spouses traveled to LT's Catfish Place in Purvis for an evening of fellowship and food.

6. **Friendship Church, Aberdeen**, is hosting Marty Funderburke in concert June 25, 6:30 p.m. A love offering will be received.

7. The fourth annual Summer Blast will be held July 15 – 16, at the **New Albany SportsPlex, New Albany**. The ministry began as a community project to witness to young people and to give Christian teenagers and young adults a place to bring their unsaved friends. Friday night is Southern Gospel night, featuring David Jeremiah, the Crabb family, Gold City, and Dennis Swanberg. Saturday is contemporary night, featuring Pillar, Tree63, Tony Nolan, and Extreme Team Bikes. Gates open 5:30 p.m. Friday and 2:30 p.m. Saturday. There is an admission charge. The event is sponsored by several community organizations, businesses, churches, and the Union County Association. For information, call (662) 534-5829 or (662) 266-1887, or visit www.newalbanysummerblast.com.



4. Fran Buckley Women on Mission group, First Church, McComb



3. RA and GA Recognition, Williamsville Church, Kosciusko



5. Senior adults trip, First Church, McLaurin

JUST FOR THE RECORD

8. Plainway Church, Laurel, recently held homecoming services. Shown are the church's three pastors: Nonnie Jefcoat, Harold C. Ishee, and Kent McGehee.
9. The Mt. Gilead Church, Meridian, B.Y.W. held a banquet for the senior adults April 30. The church also held a recognition service for the senior adults May 1, with the senior choir providing the special music. Gilbert Eaves, pastor; Janice Powell, senior adult coordinator. Shown are the senior adults.
10. Southside Church, Aberdeen, ordained George Collins, Jr., to the Gospel ministry May 15. Shown is Dennis Sullivan, pastor, Southside, and Collins.
11. Grays Creek Church, Hernando, is presenting America We Must Not Forget, a musical patriotic call for revival in America to honor unsung heroes. Performances are July 8, 7 p.m. and July 10, 11 a.m.
12. Thompson Church, Smithdale, is hosting its first Family Fun Day, Summerfest 2005, June 11 at 4 p.m. Activities include games for children, remote car races, battery powered jeep races, a 4-wheeler mud bog, space walks, and a dunking booth. At 7 p.m. New Life Country Gospel will present an old-fashioned sing. Concessions are available. For more information, call (601) 567-9552 or (601) 684-8044.



10. Ordination, Southside Church, Aberdeen



8. Homecoming Services, Plainway Church, Laurel



9. Senior Adults, Mt. Gilead Church, Meridian

OBITUARIES

Charles Hubert Melton, Jr., passed away May 21, with services held at First Church, Newton, and interment in the Newton Masonic Cemetery.

Melton was on the faculty of Clarke College from 1962 until his retirement and was also director of missions for Newton Association. In 1978 he was appointed to the Southern Baptist Task Force for Blind Ministry. He is survived by his wife, Vera Virginia, Newton; a daughter, a sister, and five grandsons.

Fourth Annual Father's Day Tribute June 19, 2005

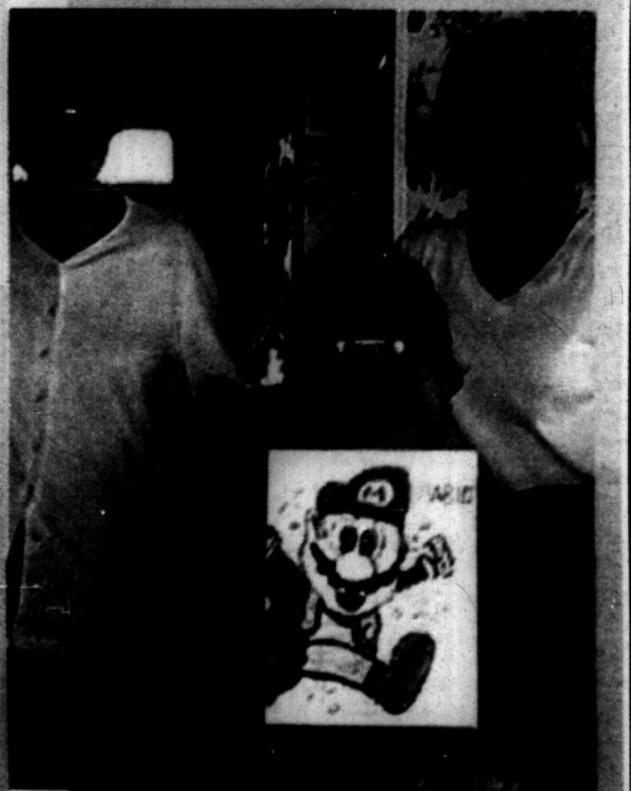
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JUST FOR THE RECORD

MS POSITIONS

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PLEASANT HILL BAPTIST CHURCH will be accepting resumes for church secretary until June 8, 2005. Interested parties should send their resumes to PHBC, 1383 Pleasant Hill Road, Columbus, MS 39702, attn: personnel committee.

PART-TIME COOK needed to prepare Wednesday night fellowship meals. Send resume to Hillcrest Baptist Church, 5950 Terry Road, Byram, MS 39272, or call (601) 372-0132.

FAITH BAPTIST CHURCH, located on the corner of Northside Drive and Manhattan in North Jackson, wants to hire a full or part-time person who is interested in outreach for children, the homebound and elderly in the church. If you are interested, please send your resume or contact Dr. Greg Wolfe, pastor, P.O. Box 13675, Jackson, MS 39236 or phone (601) 368-2983.

CHURCH SECRETARY: full-time opening for publications, media, and music ministry secretary. Highland Baptist Church, 2513 N. 7th Avenue, Laurel, MS 39440. Visit church website at www.highland-church.net. From website menu, select "HBC Employment Opportunities" for more information.

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13. 3rd Grade Bible Drillers, Williamsville Church, Kosciusko

13. **Williamsville Church, Kosciusko**, congratulates their third grade Bible drill participants. Shown are Charlie and Eddie Plunkett with helper Ann Williamson.

14. **Williamsville Church, Kosciusko**, congratulates their fifth and sixth grade state Bible drill participants. Shown are Conner and Casey Pounders, Sarah Plunkett, Samantha Clark, Anna Miles; helpers: Jimmy and Ann Williamson.

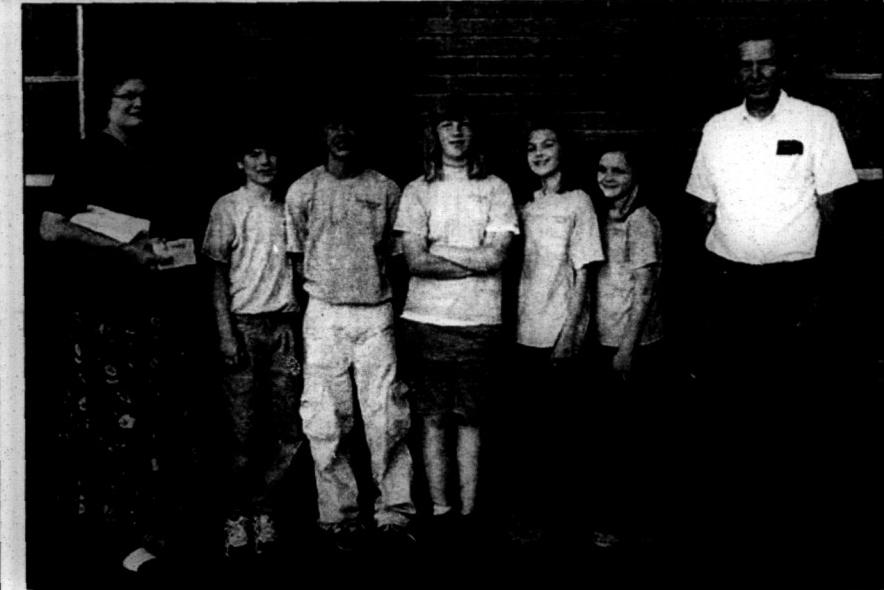
15. **Williamsville Church, Kosciusko**, congratulates their Youth bible drillers.

Shown are Sarah and Kelly Quick with helpers, Kathy Barnes and Lenita Gentry.



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14. 5th and 6th Grade Bible Drillers, Williamsville Church, Kosciusko



15. Youth Bible Drillers, Williamsville Church, Kosciusko

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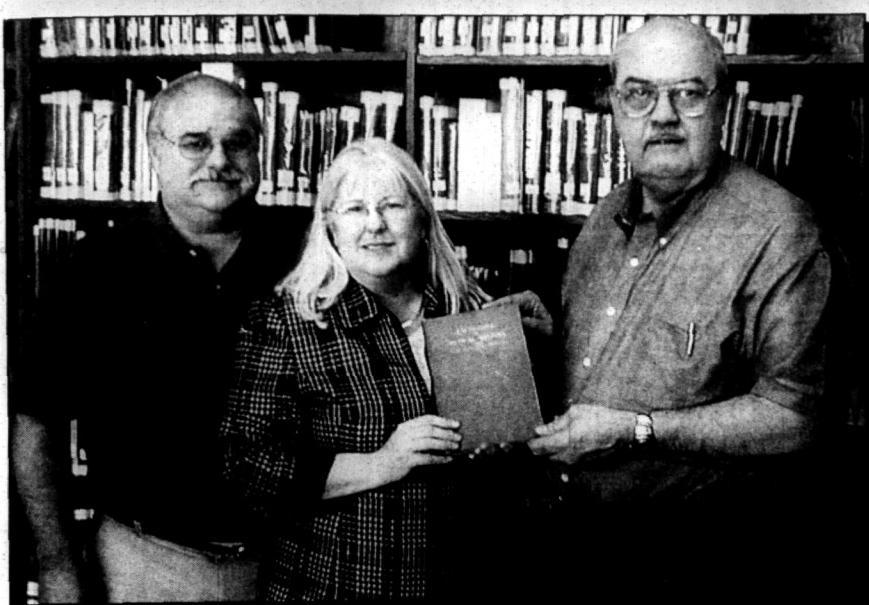
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COLLEGE NEWS



Haydon, Keithcart, and Winters, WCC

John Haydon, San Jose, Cal., and his sister Betsy Keithcart, Elk Grove, Cal., presented an autographed copy of the 1917 edition of Helen and Clarence Dickinson's book, *Excursions*.

in Musical History to Gene Winters, interim dean of the Winters School of Music at **William Carey College**. Shown are Haydon, Keithcart, and Winters.

Liberty Church, Jefferson Community, Carroll County: Homecoming, June 5; worship, 10:45 a.m., followed by lunch on the grounds and music, 1:30 p.m.; Paul Miller, preaching; Lavonne Swindle, music.

Indian Springs Church, Petal: Homecoming, June 5; Sunday School, 10 a.m.; worship, 11 a.m.; lunch followed by afternoon service, 1:30 p.m. Mugsy Davis, preaching; the Gap Band, Carterville Church, Petal, music; Brad Howard, pastor.

First Church, Sumrall: Centennial revival, June 19-22; Sunday, 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m.; Harold Bryson, Eddie Hamilton, Don Nerren, George Berger, and David Waits, preaching; Daniel Lee, Bill Herman, and Phillip Butler, music.

County Line Church, Dossville: Revival, June 5 - 8; Sun., 11 a.m.; Sun. - Wed., 7 p.m. Lunch Sunday after worship; Matt Brady, Durant, preaching; Tom and Linda Thompson, music; James Burrell, pastor.

Laurel Hill Church, Philadelphia: Homecoming and centennial, June 12; worship Sunday, 10:45 a.m., followed by covered dish lunch; Centennial Celebration, 1 p.m.; Hugh Martin, pastor.

Bowlin Church, Sallis: Homecoming, June 12; worship, 11 a.m. Larry Odom, pastor; Bo Cochran, music.

Union Church, Brookhaven: Homecoming, June 12; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.; worship, 11 a.m.; covered dish luncheon, noon, and afternoon gospel singing, 1:30 p.m. Joel Brister, preaching; Embrace, music; John Fisk, Sr., pastor.

VBS

First Church, McLaurin: VBS, Ramblin' Road Trip, June 6 - 10, 6 - 8:30 p.m. for youth, and June 20 - 24, 6 - 9 p.m., children.

Euclatubba Church, Saltillo: VBS, June 6 - 10, 6 - 8:15 p.m.

Harrisville Church, Harrisville: VBS, Ramblin' Road Trip, June 6 - 10, 8:30 - 11:45 a.m.

Wayside Church, Vicksburg: VBS, June 6 - 10, 8:30 - 11:30 a.m., ages 5 - 12.

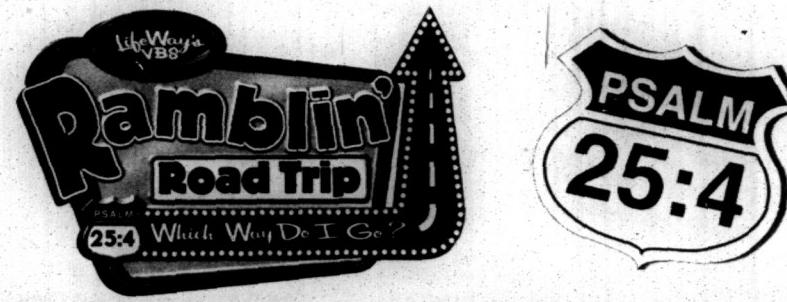
First Church, Brandon, West Campus: VBS, Ramblin'

Road Trip, June 13 - 16, 6 - 8:30 p.m.; VBS Celebration concert, June 17, 6:30 p.m. with Jeff Slaughter; admission \$1. For more information, call (601) 825-6766.

Kokomo Church, Kokomo: VBS, June 6 - 10. Gail Kessler, director; Glenn Nace, pastor.

Griffin Memorial Church, Jackson: VBS, June 12 - 16; 6 - 8 p.m.; ages 4 through 6th grade.

Liberty Church, Liberty: VBS, Ramblin' Road Trip, June 6 - 10; 8:30 a.m. - noon; ages 3 through 6th grade.



Bibliocipher

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ZVAC GSHT MENCTLL VP
AED, SCW XHETW, LSJECR,
NAEL MSL AT VP MAVD E
LKSFT, AT NASN XVDTNA
SPNTH DT EL KHTPTH-
HTW GTPVHT DT: PVH AT
MSL GTPVHT DT.

ZVAC VCT: PEPNTTC

Clue: A = H

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Mark One: Two.

Mt. Carmel Church, Edinburg: Revival, June 5 - 8; Sun., 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon. - Wed., 7 p.m. Walter Goodman, Austin, Tex., evangelist; Keith Fulton, music; special praise music program June 7 led by Proclamation.

County Line Church, Rankin County: Homecoming, June 12; worship, 10:45 a.m., followed by lunch; Bryan Sherman, speaking; Mickey Ferguson, pastor.

Interstate Church, Shaw: Homecoming, June 5; worship, 11 a.m.; covered dish lunch; afternoon service, 1 p.m.; Bobby Douglas, preaching; the Steadman Singers, music; Robert Haney, pastor.

Hamburg Church, Roxie: Revival, June 5 - 10; Sunday, 11 a.m.; Mon. - Fri., 7 p.m.; Gene Douglas, evangelist; Calvin Wactor, pastor.

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Gifts of Honor and Memory

A portion of **The Village View** is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special friends.

May 15-25

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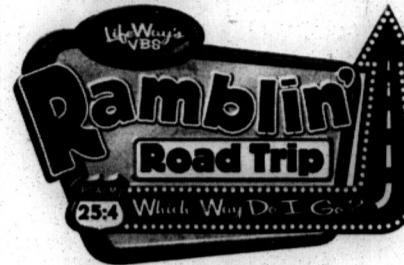
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HOW CAN I HELP THE BCV CHILDREN THIS SUMMER?

Summer months are full of fun & sun activities for all the children and teenagers in the care of The Baptist Children's Village.

The cost of providing summer fun for 160 children and teenagers is significant. You can help us by providing the following:

- Elbow & Knee Pads
- Wendy's Gift Certificates

Build a Summer Fun Gift Pack with these items:

towel • sunscreen • flip flops • goggles
insect repellent • lotion • aloe vera gel

For more information contact:

Chrystelle Thames
cthames@baptistchildrensvillage.com
601.922.2242

Current Needs:

One of the BCV residents has been chosen to participate in the National Student Leadership Conference in Washington D.C. this summer. We are in need of financial sponsors for this trip.

Also, a BCV resident is participating in high school band and is in need of a high quality new or used clarinet. The resident will begin band camp in July.

FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

Life Begins at Reception

John 1:10-13; 3:5-8, 14-18, 36

By Rhoda Royce

Mississippians take second place to no group I have known in valuing, and discussing, family relationships. In many families, the impending birth of a baby, a new relation, shifts family members into overdrive. Between the begetting and the birth, everyone outside the womb has jobs. Mom must eat and sleep well and work with Dad to make decisions about work and home, to prepare the baby's living space, to rearrange finances, to reallocate household and child care responsibilities, and to consult on names. Grandparents count the days, buy too much, and try to give advice only when asked. The baby just develops, unaware of all these loving acts on his or her behalf.



Royce

Jesus called what happens when a person receives Christ a birth from above, or rebirth. Theologians call this spiritual birth "regeneration" (re-generation). Our study this week focuses on the three persons of the Trinity and their actions in the spiritual begetting and birth process when God transforms a human being into His spiritual child.

Christ, Logos and Son (1:10-13) — The Prologue to John's gospel propels us on a cosmic trip into eternity, into the union and communion of the Trinity. In awe, we recognize Christ's activity in all creation and in sorrow we remember that when He came to Earth, even "to his own," He was rejected. In John 8:19, Jesus shared a reason for this: the rejecters did not know

either Christ or the Father. In other words, they missed the family likeness. This happens still.

Yet to those who open their hearts to Him, believing in His name, or identity, Jesus Christ gives the right, or power, to become the children of God.

Human babies cannot be born of their own volition. They require outside help. We can neither explain nor adequately describe Christ's power, or authority, to recreate finite sinners of the human family into spiritual children fully accepted into the family of God. We can, however, allow this power to transform us. We can trust that the authority active in the physical creation we see today will someday present us "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 1:24).

The Spirit, Agent of Spiritual Birth (3:5-8) — Several years ago, I was picked out of a large crowd by a friend of my

aunt's; she told me she'd recognize the dark Russell eyebrows anywhere! Our parents' DNA can be traced in our own and in our children's physical natures. No matter how much we seek to "improve" ourselves, we can't transcend our physical natures and become something else — unless the Spirit intervenes.

Nicodemus, a prominent member of Jewish religious society, came to talk to Jesus at night. Nicodemus may not have known it, but the Spirit was already blowing in his direction, enabling him to recognize God's presence in Jesus' acts. Nicodemus probably regarded himself by virtue of his Jewish genealogy as already a member of God's kingdom. Jesus explained that only the Spirit can bring forth a spiritual nature and that being born anew of "water and Spirit" is necessary for individual entrance into God's kingdom. The Spirit breathes spiritual life into a new child of God, purifying the new believer with the washing that makes him a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

God the Father, Initiator of Salvation (John 3:14-18,36) — In the wilderness in Moses' day, as in Jesus' time, God was the originator of salvation, and the motive was His love. Verse 16 assures us, as Frederick Faber put it, of the "wideness in God's mercy."

As I write on Mother's Day weekend, an ocean separates me from our son. I know I never would send him so much "further" away, out of eternity into time, out of perfection into imperfection, out of love into rejection, to suffer for others' failures and to save them. I can hardly imagine that kind of love, but I can, and I must, respond to it. No human can cause himself to be born spiritually, but he can cause himself to die spiritually by refusing to receive Christ Jesus by faith.

Rejoice today that as a child of God, you are the inheritor of eternal life, through the power of Jesus Christ, the washing of the Spirit, and the love of God.

Rhoda Royce is a member of First Church, Clinton.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Taking on a Tough Task

Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:3-5; 3:4-11

By Don Schuman

1. You Can Serve (1:1-3)

Ezekiel lived in a particularly tough time in the history of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar had taken many inhabitants of Jerusalem, including Ezekiel, into captivity. Ezekiel was a stranger in an unclean land, by Jewish standards.

It was time when the message of God to His people was tough. Judgment was coming upon the land. The beloved city, Jerusalem, and the magnificent Temple built by Solomon would be completely destroyed. Captivity would last longer than the people had expected. That would be a tough message for the nation to accept. Judah would not like what Ezekiel had to say. They would regard his messages as attempts



Schuman

to discourage the people, as only "gloom and doom."

So Ezekiel had to be tough. He had to be creative, but strong, in his preaching. His name "Ezekiel" means "God will strengthen," and he needed God's strength to serve Him during those tough times.

To serve in this tough time, the hand of the Lord was upon Ezekiel (v.3). And isn't that true for us today? Especially in tough times, Christians can sense the hand of the Lord upon us. In dangerous and discouraging times of service, we are lifted up by His hand. His Spirit enables us to serve.

2. You Can Take Tough Assignments (2:3-5)

To serve Him in this extremely tough time, God first equipped

Ezekiel for this tough assignment. Not only was the hand of the Lord upon him, but also, Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord (1:4-28). Ezekiel needed to see that God was still in control on His throne. Ezekiel's vision offers assurance to us today that, even when our assignments are

tough, God is still on His throne. Today, and throughout eternity, God is in control.

Next the Lord spoke to Ezekiel (2:1-10). He specifically described the tough task of preaching to a stubborn and hardhearted people (2:3-5). Ezekiel would declare the word of God to them and whether or not they believed, they would know that a prophet had been among them. Today, His Word and our witness declare that Jesus continues to save. Whether the lost of this world will believe or not, there are witnesses of God among them.

The false prophets of Ezekiel's day were preaching an easy mes-

sage of false optimism. God called and equipped Ezekiel to prophesy the tough, but true, message of God. Throughout the history of Israel and Judah, in times of great crisis, God had raised up great prophets and leaders to take tough assignments and proclaim His truth. He still calls them today.

3. You Can Serve Confidently (3:4-11)

There is an old adage that says — "You are what you eat." In chapter 3, the Lord tells Ezekiel to eat a scroll of tough words to preach. Not only did God give Ezekiel the words to say, He promised to make him as tough as the "hardheaded" people to whom he would preach.

There are times when we must stand tough. We may have to take a tough stand at work by not participating in inappropriate behavior. We may have to take a tough stand against a family member or friend living in sin. We may have to take a tough stand against a popular, but unbiblical, idea in our community. We

can either stand tall or fall short. Let us serve confidently, knowing that God is in control, we have His Word to share, and we have his hand, His Spirit, to guide and strengthen us.

Ezekiel had a responsibility to warn the people of judgment. Although life in Christ is one of great joy, hope, and peace, it is also one of great responsibility. Our Lord has commanded us to be witnesses (Acts 1:8), to go tell, and to make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20).

We are also admonished: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." (1 Cor. 16:13 KJV) We are also to warn of the judgment every person must face. It is a tough task. Were it not for His power in us, it would be an impossible task. God does not give us a work to do without equipping us first. Today, we, like Ezekiel, are to be guided by the Spirit in the power of God to confidently serve our Lord to the glory of God.

Schuman is pastor of Hamilton Church, Ashland.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

THE BAPTIST Record

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the **who, what, when, where** details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts

are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted.

All news items are subject to editing,

and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape-, building-, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. Requests to return photographs must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

NOBTS prison degree program spreading to Miss.

ANGOLA, La., (BP) — Joy, hope, and anticipation marked the faces of the 66 graduates participating in the May 17 New Orleans Seminary (NOBTS) commencement services behind the bars of the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola.

The drab surroundings of the prison dining hall could not suppress the smiles of the graduates — inmates at the state's massive maximum security prison — as they received their degrees. The standing-room-only crowd included spouses and children of the inmates, some from as far away as Oregon. Also on hand were other prisoners in the seminary program, faculty and staff members from the seminary, and many state and local Baptist leaders who assist with the program.

Many of the 66 men who graduated received both the associate in Christian ministry and the bachelor of arts in Christian ministry degrees, a total of 117 degrees from the seminary's Leavell College.

Due to the success of the program, several wardens in other states are asking the seminary to bring the program to their prisons as well, with NOBTS having launched a similar program at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman.

"The hardest thing to describe about an Angola graduation is the sense of joy and love present in the room," seminary President Chuck Kelley said after the event. "It's not only in the excitement of those students who are graduating, but more than anything it is the excitement from the families."

Kelley said he talked with parents who had once given up on their son only to find hope again as they participated in the service. The families have seen what a difference faith in Christ can make in the lives of their loved ones. The faces of the family members, he said, express an indescribable joy.



POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE — New Orleans Seminary President Chuck Kelley congratulates one of the graduates during May 17 seminary commencement services at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola. The popular program has sparked interest in other state prison systems, including Mississippi. (BP photo)

"That's what reconciliation is about. That's what redemption is about," Kelley said. "It's about seeing God take a life that was terribly broken and doing such a work that family members are glad to have them as part of the family again."

The day was filled with touching story lines. Clifshaque Jones, a current Leavell College student at the seminary's New Orleans campus, traveled to Angola with the seminary faculty and staff to surprise her father Cliff Jones, who was among the graduates. Her father has been incarcerated since she was age six, and visits have been few and far between. Before the service began, father and daughter enjoyed a happy reunion and following the graduation, Clifshaque and her father were able to visit for several hours.

Young children cheered as their fathers walked up to receive their degrees. One

inmate carried his six-year-old daughter with him as he received his bachelor's diploma from Kelley. One recently paroled inmate came back to the prison to participate in the commencement service. His fellow graduates marveled that this "free man" would return to share the day with them.

During the ceremony the inmates gave a standing ovation to John Robson, director of the NOBTS program at Angola who works tirelessly to provide the learning opportunity.

Many of the 150 inmates who have graduated since the program began serve as ministers inside the prison walls. A few of the graduates have been sent to other prisons in the state and other camps on Angola's 18,000-acre farm to serve as inmate-missionaries. Through the ministry of these inmate-ministers, an average 80-plus

of their fellow inmates are coming to faith in Christ each year.

"Christians don't have to be a majority to have a great influence," Kelley said. "This small number of men, by living and working among the other prisoners, are affecting the entire population of the prison."

Jimmy Dukes, dean of the extension center system at NOBTS, said the Christian prisoners should serve as a model for churches.

"Those 150 graduates have had a tremendous impact on the culture in which they live," Dukes said. "This Angola experience is the clearest example of the church affecting its culture that I have seen."

When Burl Cain, a Southern Baptist layman, became warden at Angola, education at the prison had become a problem. Angola had lost its Pell Grants, and Cain could not see a solution.

T.W. Terrell, who was director of missions at Louisiana's Judson Association at the time, suggested Cain approach the seminary about offering training opportunities for the Christian inmates. Though Cain doubted NOBTS would be interested in coming to Angola, he asked anyway. To his surprise, the seminary was eager to get involved.

NOBTS began by offering a nationally accredited associate degree in ministry in 1995. The program was expanded to include an accredited bachelor's degree in 1997. Since then 150 men have graduated from the program.

"I want to thank New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Dr. Kelley," Cain said. "Dr. Kelley had the vision to realize that the best way to have a prison ministry was to change the culture and teach inmates to minister themselves."

The program represents a true Kingdom effort for Southern Baptists, between the seminary, the Louisiana Baptist Convention, the Woman's Missionary Union of Louisiana, Judson Association, and countless churches.

JUST FOR THE RECORD



16. Wallerville Church, Union



17. Youth Bible Drillers, Mantee Church, Mantee



18. Children's Musical, Friendship Church, Aberdeen

16. Brother and sister David and Elizabeth Vanlandingham, members of Wallerville Church, Union Association, are shown wearing their Sunday School perfect attendance pins. David, 14, has 14 years perfect attendance and Elizabeth, 10, has 10 years perfect attendance.

17. Mantee Church, Mantee, recognizes their youth Bible drillers. Shown are Joseph

Carpenter, Dianne Neal, Ryan Spencer, Preston Sullivan, Zach Williams, Amber Hudspeth, Kristin Young, Kayla Davis, and Caitlin Carty.

18. Friendship Church, Aberdeen, presented the children's musical, It's Cool in the Furnace, May 1. Shown are the participants.

19. Meadow Grove Church, Brandon, recognizes their Bible drillers. Shown are

Anna Schell, Laurel Bynum, Amy Ray, Kelsey Pettus, and Andrew Wilson.

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19. Bible Drillers, Meadow Grove Church, Brandon